

How to Prepare Your Children for Work

By Wendy Schwartz

Job Readiness Skills

Young people need certain kinds of skills called "job readiness skills" in order to get and keep a job. This is true whether the job is after-school work or fulltime work that can lead to a lifetime of employment in increasingly better positions.

Children learn many of these skills in academic and vocational classes in middle and high school. They learn additional job skills later, in higher education and job training programs. Young people also get some job readiness skills by watching how people around them deal with work and work-related issues.

Recently, some employers were polled to find out which skills are most important for young people working at their first job to have. The skills mentioned by the employers are described below.

Academic Skills

Employers frequently use job application letters and forms, and interviews, to evaluate applicants' academic skills. So, it is important for young applicants to fill out forms correctly and to behave well at an interview, especially when they have no prior job experience to demonstrate their abilities. In general, employers want employees to have these skills:

- The ability and willingness to learn quickly.
- Knowledge of standard English
- Mathematics

Vocational Skills

Employers will train their workers in the special skills needed for a particular job, and some will also provide more general job training to help their workers learn more skills and remain on the job. Still, some employers want new workers to have these job skills already:

- The ability to solve problems
- The ability to communicate
- The ability to do manual task

Work-Related Habits and Attitudes

These are the qualities desired by most employers:

- A general understanding of the workplace and the world of business, and basic knowledge about the employer's operations.
- Dependability,
- The willingness to ask questions.
- Trustworthiness and honesty.
- Respect
- Patience and cooperation
- Good appearance

How Parents Can Help Children Prepare for the Work World

Parents can help prepare children to enter the work world by making sure that they have the skills described above. You can do these things:

- Find out what your children are learning in school. If job readiness skills aren't part of the curriculum, talk to a counselor or administrator.
- Make sure your children are really learning what they are taught, so they will have the skills they need to get and keep a job.
- Arrange for your children to get extra instruction in English or math if they need it to get a good job.

Make sure your children go to school every day, arrive on time, are respectful to teachers and peers, and do what is expected of them. This will help them develop the habits that employers want workers to have.

Help children fill out practice job applications, or find someone at school or in the community who can do this.

- Talk about your own experiences on the job, both good and bad, so children will know what to expect at work and can start preparing for new experiences.
- Explain that even if you yourself haven't had much job success, it doesn't mean that your children can't get a good job, do well at it, and enjoy the work.